

## GAO: Military not meeting sex assault regs

By CHAD GARLAND  
*Stars and Stripes*

The military failed to keep up with the mushrooming number of measures that Congress has required the armed services to implement to address sexual assault, a government watchdog revealed.

As of October 2021, the Defense Department had not fully implemented 18% of the nearly 200 unique requirements imposed in legislation since 2004, the Government Accountability Office found in a report published this week.

The Homeland Security Department had not fully implemented six of 36, or about 16% of those affecting the Coast Guard, the report said.

The departments' lack of full implementation of dozens of requirements could have stymied efforts to combat what Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has called "persistent and corrosive problems" of sexual assault and harassment.

Both DOD and Homeland Security concurred with the report's 23 recommendations, which largely call on the agencies to fully implement the unmet parts of the requirements that are still active.

In separate responses, the departments said they are addressing several of the requirements.

Many of the unmet requirements involve oversight, evaluation and reporting on military efforts to prevent sexual assault, in-

vestigate crimes and protect or advocate for victims.

DOD has long faced criticism for its handling of sexual assault and harassment issues, including from the public, service members and lawmakers.

Late last year, Austin approved a series of actions recommended by an independent review commission, ordering the military departments to implement the plan swiftly and deliberately.

Months later, Congress removed prosecution of sexual assault and related crimes from the military chain.

But the latest GAO audit, ordered by Congress two years ago, looked at earlier measures intended to combat the problem. Those measures were enacted in

annual defense authorization bills from 2004 to 2019.

In all, some 249 measures were passed into law, of which 181 remained in effect at the end of the 15-year period.

The greatest share of these affected the Pentagon or the military branches. While DOD satisfied most of them, "several issues limit oversight" of prevention and response programs, the GAO found.

Noncompliance with all the requirements could have left DOD, Congress and the public without the data needed to ensure adherence to efforts to support victims and prevent sexual assault, or to direct resources where they were most needed, the report suggested.

## Ruling protects Navy's religious vaccine refusers

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — A federal judge in Texas is barring the Navy from taking action for now against sailors who have objected to being vaccinated against COVID-19 on religious grounds.

U.S. District Judge Reed O'Connor had in January issued a preliminary injunction preventing the Navy from disciplining or discharging 35 sailors who sued over the Navy's vaccine policy while their case played out. On Monday, O'Connor agreed the case could go forward as a class action lawsuit and issued a preliminary injunction covering the approximately 4,000 sailors who have objected on religious grounds to being vaccinated.

O'Connor said the larger group of sailors shared common characteristics with those who had sued. They had asked for and been denied an exemption to the vaccine requirement on religious grounds and were facing the threat of being discharged from the Navy, O'Connor wrote.

"Even though their personal circumstances may factually differ in small ways, the

threat is the same — get the jab or lose your job," wrote O'Connor, who was nominated to the bench by President George W. Bush.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin last year made vaccinations mandatory for service members.

More than 99% of the Navy's active-duty force has been vaccinated against COVID-19, and the Navy has also discharged 650 people for refusing to be vaccinated. Navy guidelines allow for exemptions to the vaccine requirement on religious and other grounds, including medical reasons and if a service member is about to leave the Navy.

Lawyers for the group of sailors who sued, most of them SEALs, have argued that the Navy granted hundreds of exemptions for medical and administrative reasons, but granted no religious exemptions for active-duty and reserve service members. Nine inactive reserve members have been granted religious exemptions.

Mike Berry, the director of military affairs for First Liberty Institute, which is representing the sailors, said in a statement following O'Connor's action that it's "time for

our military to honor its constitutional obligations and grant religious accommodations for service members with sincere religious objections to the vaccine."

While the case is still at an early stage, the U.S. Supreme Court in a brief order Friday narrowed the impact of O'Connor's original injunction, saying that the Navy could still consider the vaccination status of the sailors who sued in making deployment, assignment and other operational decisions.

O'Connor's latest injunction allows the Navy to consider vaccination status in making those decisions about members of the larger group as well.

President Joe Biden's administration had argued that not allowing the Navy to consider vaccination status in making assignments posed "intolerable risks to safety and mission success."

"Navy personnel routinely operate for extended periods of time in confined spaces that are ripe breeding grounds for respiratory illnesses, where mitigation measures such as distancing are impractical or impossible," Biden administration lawyers wrote.

# Russian shelling in Ukraine dims optimism

*Associated Press*

KYIV, Ukraine — Russian forces bombarded areas around Kyiv and another city just hours after pledging to scale back military operations in those places to help negotiations along, Ukrainian authorities said Wednesday.

The shelling — and intensified Russian attacks on other parts of the country — tempered optimism about any progress in the talks aimed at ending the punishing war.

The Russian military's announcement Tuesday that it would de-escalate near the capital and Chernihiv to "increase mutual trust" was met with deep suspicion from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the West.

Soon after, Ukrainian officials reported that Russian shelling hit homes, stores, libraries and other civilian sites in and around Chernihiv and on the outskirts of Kyiv. Russian troops also stepped up their attacks around the eastern city of Izyum and the eastern Donetsk region, after re-deploying some units from other areas, the Ukrainian side said.

Olexander Lomako, secretary of the Chernihiv city council, said the Russian announcement turned out to be "a complete lie."

"At night they didn't decrease, but vice versa increased the intensity of military action," Lomako said.

Five weeks into the invasion that has left thousands dead on both sides, the number of Ukrainians fleeing the country topped a staggering 4 million, half of them children, according to the United Nations.

At a round of talks held Tuesday in Istanbul, the faint outlines of a possible peace agreement seemed to emerge when the Ukrainian delegation offered a framework under which the country would declare itself neutral — dropping its bid to join NATO, as Moscow has long demanded — in return for security guarantees from a group of other nations.

Vladimir Medinsky, head of the Russian delegation, said Ukraine's readiness to consider neutral status would meet a key Russian demand.

Medinsky said in televised comments that the proposals signaled Ukraine's readiness to reach agreement "for the first time in years," adding that if Ukraine makes good on its offer, "the threat of creating a NATO bridgehead on the Ukrainian territory will be removed."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov sounded a positive note as well but added, "We can't say there has been something promising or any breakthroughs."

After the Kremlin's announcement that it would scale back some of its military operations, Zelenskyy reacted by saying that when dealing with the Russians, "you can trust only concrete results."

"We judge the Russian military machine by its actions, not just its words," British Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab likewise told Sky News.

"There's obviously some skepticism that it will regroup to attack again rather than seriously engaging in diplomacy."

He added: "Of course, the door to diplomacy will always be left ajar, but I don't think you can trust what is coming out of the mouth of Putin's war machine."

The skepticism appeared well-founded on Wednesday.

Oleksandr Pavliuk, head of the Kyiv region military administration, said Russian shells targeted residential areas and civilian infrastructure in the Bucha, Brovary and Vyshhorod regions around the capital.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said the military also targeted fuel depots in two towns in central Ukraine with air-launched long-range cruise missiles.

And Russian forces hit a Ukrainian special forces headquarters in the southern Mykolaiv region, he said, and two ammunition depots in the Donetsk region.

Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said that over the last 24 hours, the U.S. has seen some Russian troops moving north away from Kyiv into Belarus but does not view this as a withdrawal, just an effort by Moscow to resupply, refit and then reposition the troops.

## Wolters says more troops likely to deploy to Europe

BY SVETLANA SHKOLNIKOVA

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The United States will likely send more troops to Europe as Russia continues to wage a brutal war against Ukraine that threatens the stability and peace of the Continent, the commander of U.S. forces in Europe told senators on Tuesday.

American military presence in Europe ballooned from 60,000 personnel to 102,000 since Russia launched a full-scale attack last month against its neighboring country, upending decades of general security in the region, Air Force Gen. Tod Wolters said.

"My suspicion is we're going to still need more," the commander of U.S. European Command told members of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The decision to deploy additional rotational or permanent forces will depend on the actions of European countries and the needs of NATO, said Wolters, who also serves as NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe. The military alliance announced last week that it will deploy four new battle groups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, doubling NATO's forces on its eastern flank.

As Russia massed thousands of troops along Ukraine's border in January, EUCOM confirmed it is also building a headquarters for U.S. Special Forces in Albania.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., asked Wolters on Tuesday how the new military base will benefit the region. He said the outpost will lead efforts to provide intelligence to the Balkans.

"It will make that region much stronger and much more ready when it comes to identifying nefarious activities that start to creep in," he said.

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., questioned the ability of U.S. forces to collect accurate information, noting the U.S. had overestimated Russia's military might and underestimated Ukraine's defensive strength.

"What we were hearing is the Russians would defeat the Ukrainians and obtain their invasion objectives within five days or so," he said. "Is there an intelligence gap in our capability?"

Wolters conceded there "could be" and he said EUCOM would conduct a comprehensive review of its weaknesses after the crisis in Ukraine ends.

# Collins will back Jackson for high court

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Maine Sen. Susan Collins said Wednesday that she will vote to confirm Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, giving Democrats at least one Republican vote and all but assuring that Jackson will become the first Black woman on the Supreme Court.

Collins said in a statement that she met with Jackson a second time after four days of hearings last week and decided that “she possesses the experience, qualifications and integrity to serve as an Associate Justice on the Supreme Court.”

“I will, therefore, vote to confirm her to this position,” Collins said.

Her support gives Democrats at least a

one-vote cushion in the 50-50 Senate and likely saves them from having to use Vice President Kamala Harris’ tie-breaking vote to confirm President Joe Biden’s pick. It is expected that all 50 Democrats will support Jackson, though one notable moderate Democrat, Arizona Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, hasn’t yet said how she will vote.

Jackson, who would replace retiring Justice Stephen Breyer, would be the third Black justice, after Thurgood Marshall and Clarence Thomas, and the sixth woman. She would also be the first former public defender on the court.

Collins was the most likely Republican to support Jackson, and she has a history of voting for Supreme Court nominees picked

by presidents of both parties. The only nominee she’s voted against since her election in the mid-1990s is Justice Amy Coney Barrett in 2020. She said in the statement that she doesn’t expect that she will always agree with Jackson’s decisions.

“That alone, however, is not disqualifying,” Collins said. “Indeed, that statement applies to all six Justices, nominated by both Republican and Democratic Presidents, whom I have voted to confirm.”

It is unclear if any other GOP senators will vote for Jackson. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, of Kentucky, said last week said he will not support her, citing concerns about her sentencing record and her support from liberal advocacy groups.

## US astronaut, 2 Russian cosmonauts return to Earth

*Associated Press*

A NASA astronaut caught a Russian ride back to Earth on Wednesday after a U.S. record 355 days at the International Space Station, returning with two cosmonauts to a world torn apart by war.

Mark Vande Hei landed in a Soyuz capsule in Kazakhstan alongside the Russian Space Agency’s Pyotr Dubrov, who also spent the previous year in space, and Anton Shkaplerov. Wind blew the capsule onto its side following touchdown, and the trio emerged into the late afternoon sun one by one. Vande Hei, the last one out of the capsule, grinned and waved as he was carried to a reclining chair out in the

open Kazakh steppes.

“It’s beautiful out here,” said Vande Hei, putting on a face mask and ballcap.

Despite escalating tensions between the United States and Russia over Vladimir Putin’s war with Ukraine, Vande Hei’s return followed customary procedures. A NASA team of doctors and staff was on hand for the touchdown and planned to return immediately to Houston with the 55-year-old astronaut.

Even before Russia’s Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, Vande Hei said he was avoiding the subject with his two Russian crewmates. Despite getting along “fantastically ... I’m not sure we really want to go

there,” he said.

It was the first taste of gravity for Vande Hei and Dubrov since their Soyuz launch on April 9. Shkaplerov joined them at the orbiting lab in October, escorting a Russian film crew up for a brief stay. To accommodate that visit, Vande Hei and Dubrov doubled the length of their stay.

Before departing the space station, Shkaplerov embraced his fellow astronauts as “my space brothers and space sister.”

“People have problem on Earth. On orbit ... we are one crew,” Shkaplerov said in a live NASA TV broadcast Tuesday.

## US job openings, quitting at near record high in Feb.

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Job openings hovered at a near-record level in February, little changed from the previous month, continuing a trend that Federal Reserve officials see as a driver of inflation.

There were 11.3 million available jobs last month, matching January’s figure and just below December’s record of 11.4 million, the Labor Department said Tuesday.

The number of Americans quitting their jobs was also historically high, at 4.4 million, up from 4.3 million in January. More than 4.5 million people quit in November, the most on records dating back two decades. Many people are taking advantage of numerous opportunities to switch jobs, often for higher pay. The vast majority of

those quitting do so to take another position.

Tuesday’s report is separate from the government’s monthly employment report, which in February showed that employers added a robust 678,000 jobs.

The data “shows that the labor market remains torrid,” Stephen Stanley, chief economist at Amherst Pierpont, said in a research note. “In a month when the economy added 678,000 jobs, the number of job openings only went down by 17,000. That speaks to the depth of the bid that employers have for labor.”

The outsize number of available jobs and quits has contributed to rampaging inflation, as many companies have had to raise pay to attract and keep workers. In February, there were 1.8 openings for every un-

employed worker. Before the pandemic, there were usually more unemployed people than job openings.

The unemployment rate, at 3.8%, is near the pre-pandemic level of 3.5%, which was the lowest in five decades. And there are still several million fewer people working or looking for work than before the pandemic, forcing employers to compete among a smaller labor pool.

Because of those trends, Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell has singled out openings and quits as a key measure of the labor market’s health and a target of the Fed’s interest-rate policies. Powell has said the central bank hopes to reduce the number of available jobs as a way of cooling wage increases and price inflation.



# Civilian Army director led child porn ring

Associated Press

SIERRA VISTA, Ariz. — David Frodsham was a top civilian commander at a U.S. air base in Afghanistan when Army commanders ordered him home after investigating multiple complaints of sexual harassment.

“I would not recommend placing him back into a position of authority but rather pursuing disciplinary actions at his home station,” wrote one commanding officer when recommending that the Army order Frodsham to leave his post at Bagram Airfield and return to Fort Huachuca, a major Army installation in Arizona, according to a U.S. Army investigative file obtained by The Associated Press.

But when Frodsham returned to his home station in the fall of 2015, he rejoined the Network Enterprise Technology Command, the Army’s information technology service provider, where he had served as director of personnel for a global command of 15,000 soldiers and civilians, according to his Army résumé.

By spring of 2016, he was arrested in Arizona, accused of leading a child sex abuse ring that included an Army sergeant who was posting child pornography to the internet. The victims included one of Frodsham’s adopted sons.

Frodsham pleaded guilty to sex abuse charges in 2016 and is serving a 17-year sentence. But records reviewed by the AP show that the U.S. Army and the state of

Arizona missed or ignored several red flags over more than a decade, which allowed Frodsham to allegedly abuse his adopted son and other children for years, practices that made him vulnerable to blackmail.

“He would have been an obvious target of foreign intelligence services because of his role and his location,” said Frank Figliuzzi, the former assistant director of counterintelligence for the FBI. “Fort Huachuca is one of the more sensitive installations in the continental United States.” In addition to NETCOM, where Frodsham worked, Fort Huachuca is home to the Army’s Intelligence and Security Command, according to its website.

Fort Huachuca public affairs officials confirmed that Frodsham was a program manager for NETCOM before he was arrested. They declined to say whether he was disciplined after returning from Afghanistan, or whether the Army ever considered him a security risk.

Now, a continuing criminal investigation into Frodsham’s sex abuse ring is spilling over into civil court, where two of Frodsham’s adopted sons have filed separate lawsuits against the state for licensing David and Barbara Frodsham as foster parents, in a home where they say they were physically and sexually abused.

A third adopted son filed suit Tuesday in Arizona state court in Cochise County, said attorney

Lynne Cadigan, who represents all three. In the latest complaint, 19-year-old Trever Frodsham says case workers missed or overlooked numerous signs that David and Barbara Frodsham were unfit parents. These included a 2002 sex abuse complaint filed with local police by one of the Frodshams’ biological daughters against an older biological brother, and the fact that David and Barbara Frodsham are themselves victims of child sex abuse.

Trever’s allegations echo those featured in an earlier lawsuit filed by his older biological brother, Ryan Frodsham, and one filed by Neal Taylor, both of whom were also adopted into the Frodsham household.

In his lawsuit, Ryan Frodsham said the state was informed that David and Barbara Frodsham were physically abusing their children “by slapping them in the face, pinching them, hitting them with a wooden spoon,” and refusing to let them use the bathroom unless the door remained open.

In an interview with the AP, Ryan Frodsham said Barbara Frodsham never sexually abused him but walked into the room where David was abusing him at least twice. “She knew what was going on,” he said.

Arizona Department of Child Safety spokesman Darren DaRonco declined to answer specific questions about the lawsuits. He instead sent an email outlining the state’s procedures for screen-

ing prospective foster and adoptive parents. “Despite all of these safeguards, people are sometimes able to avoid detection,” DaRonco said, “especially if a person has no prior criminal or child abuse history.”

David and Barbara Frodsham have both said they were abused as minors, according to Trever Frodsham’s lawsuit. And many child welfare experts believe people with a history of child sexual abuse are more likely to abuse children in their own households and should be questioned to ensure they’ve overcome their trauma before being allowed to provide foster care.

Barbara Frodsham, who divorced David following his guilty plea, did not return telephone calls from the AP. At the time of her husband’s sentencing, she was working at Fort Huachuca as a personnel specialist. A spokeswoman at Fort Huachuca said she still holds the position.

Attorneys for the state and the other defendants are seeking to have the cases dismissed, based in part on state law that grants immunity to state employees for mistakes or misjudgments committed in the course of their work. The law does not provide immunity for “gross negligence,” which the Frodsham brothers and Neal Taylor are alleging.

The state also says all the complaints about the Frodsham children and the Frodsham home were properly handled.

## Calif. group to limit reparations to those with 19th century ties

Associated Press

California’s first-in-the-nation task force on reparations has decided to limit state compensation to the descendants of free and enslaved Black people who were in the U.S. in the 19th century, narrowly rejecting a proposal to include all Black people regardless of lineage.

The vote Tuesday split 5-4. Near the end, the Rev. Amos Brown, president of the San

Francisco branch of the NAACP and vice chair of the task force, pleaded with the commission to move ahead with a clear definition of who would be eligible for restitution.

Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation creating the two-year reparations task force in 2020, making California the only state to move ahead with a study and plan.

Reparations at the federal

level has not gone anywhere, but cities and universities are taking up the issue. California’s task force members — nearly all of whom can trace their families back to enslaved ancestors in the U.S. — were aware that their deliberations will shape discussions across the country.

Those favoring a lineage approach said that a compensation and restitution plan based on genealogy as opposed to race

has the best change of surviving a legal challenge. They also opened eligibility to free Black people who migrated to the country before the 20th century, given possible difficulties in documenting family history and the risk at the time of becoming enslaved.

Others argued that reparations should include all Black people in the U.S. who suffer from systemic racism.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Black bear stuck inside home for 45 minutes

**NH** GRAFTON — A black bear that made its way into a New Hampshire home got stuck inside the porch area and eventually left after 45 minutes — after making quite a mess.

“Naughty, NAUGHTY bear!!” Melissa Anne Kelley-Champney, of Grafton, posted on Facebook following the encounter. “We do NOT eat the walls and the doorknobs! Worst houseguest EVER!”

She said her husband had to climb out a window and go push the door open so the bear could get out. No one was hurt.

The couple estimated the bear was over 400 pounds.

### 4 teens caught after Statehouse vandalized

**IN** INDIANAPOLIS — State police turned over four teenagers to their parents after several offices in the Indiana Statehouse were vandalized.

House chambers and other parts of the building in Indianapolis were also damaged, WRTV-TV reported. A bench was also thrown from a balcony.

State Police Capt. Ron Galaviz said the three girls and one boy — ages 13 and 14 — were caught after trying to flee from Capitol police.

### 5 charged in black market gun scheme

**CA** SACRAMENTO — Five people illegally trafficked more than 500 guns from Georgia to California, where they would sell them on the black market, for more than

\$160,000 over nearly two years, federal prosecutors said.

The federal investigation began after authorities discovered that a gun used in a Sacramento shooting was traced to Georgia, the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Sacramento said in a news release.

A federal grand jury indicted the group after their arrests March 11. All five are charged with conspiracy to unlawfully deal in firearms and unlawful dealing in firearms. The defendants are: Jerrell Lawson, 31, of Sacramento; Aisha Hoggatt, 29, of Sacramento; Malek Williams, 28, of Atlanta; Terrence Phillips, 39, of Union City, Calif.; and James Gordley, 32, of Modesto, Calif. Lawson, Hoggatt, Williams and Phillips are also charged with transferring a firearm to an out-of-state resident and unlawful mailing of a firearm. Lawson faces an additional charge of being a felon in possession of a firearm.

### 3 teens charged after attack on homeless

**ME** AUBURN — A video of a pair of homeless people being assaulted led to the arrest of three teenagers in Auburn, police said.

Two girls, ages 14 and 16, were charged with aggravated assault, and a 15-year-old boy who allegedly recorded the attack was charged with conspiracy to commit aggravated assault, police said.

The attack happened in Moulton Park. The victims declined to cooperate with investigators, police said.

Two of the telephone calls reporting the attacks to police were from the mothers of two teens believed to be responsible for the al-

leged attacks, said Deputy Police Chief Timothy Cogle.

### Man charged with firing gun on school grounds

**VA** WOODBRIDGE — A northern Virginia man was arrested after firing a shotgun on school grounds when a domestic disturbance spilled over from a nearby home.

Prince William County Police said the 20-year-old man was arrested on the grounds of Rippon Middle School in Woodbridge.

According to police, school staff alerted Rippon’s school resource officer that they heard a gunshot on school grounds. The officer found the man armed with a rifle and shotgun, wearing a ski mask, and took the man into custody without incident.

Police said the man had been involved in a domestic disturbance at a home near the school. He left the house and fired at least one round from his shotgun while on school property, according to police.

### City renames street for retired educator, 102

**MS** VICKSBURG — Vicksburg renamed one of its streets in honor of a woman described by a former mayor as a historic icon.

A ceremony was held recently to mark the renaming of Hannah Avenue to Bessie Richardson Dillard Avenue, The Vicksburg Post reported.

Dillard, 102, is a retired educator who taught in the Vicksburg Warren School District for 23 years. As the mother of 10 children, she went back to school in her 40s, graduated from Alcorn State University at age 45 with a

bachelor’s degree in elementary education and went on to receive a master’s degree and specialist degree in elementary education.

### Tavern at Lincoln birthplace to reopen

**KY** HODGENVILLE — A two-year rehabilitation of the historic Knob Creek Tavern at the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historical Park is complete and the facility will open as a visitor’s center at the boyhood home this spring, officials said.

It will be the first time in more than 20 years that the Knob Creek Tavern Visitor Center will be open to guests, the park said in a statement.

The building will house museum exhibits that tell about the Lincoln family’s life while living at the Knob Creek farm.

### Airport to spend \$55M replacing X-ray devices

**GA** ATLANTA — Atlanta’s airport plans to spend \$55 million to replace X-ray machines at the main security checkpoint with more advanced scanners to screen carry-on bags.

Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport officials said the new technology will generate higher quality images for security screeners and could reduce congestion in security lines, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported. The installation is expected to begin in October, according to the Transportation Security Administration. It will be done in phases, and it could take 18 months to two years to complete the job, airport officials said.

— From wire reports

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# Only Suns have solidified playoff position

Associated Press

DENVER — Reigning NBA MVP Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets certainly figured a recent stretch of winning 14 of 18 games would propel them in the Western Conference standings.

Or at least give them some breathing room in the postseason race.

Not the case.

What their 14-4 run did was allow them to merely tread water in the sixth spot — teetering on the brink of tumbling into the play-in scenario for the teams that finish between seventh and 10th in the conference.

“The depth of the Western Conference, I think, is incredible,” marveled Nuggets coach Michael Malone, whose team has been playing without injured standouts Jamal Murray and Michael Porter Jr. “The West is loaded.”

The final two weeks of the regular season should provide entertaining theater as teams jockey

for playoff position. With, of course, the notable exception of the Phoenix Suns, who can sit back and wait to see who they play after sewing up the top seed in the West.

Everyone else has work to do.

In the East, there is very little settled, too. The top six teams are separated by just 4½ games, with Miami currently leading the way. The Heat had a big matchup with Boston on Wednesday night.

Every matchup is a big one for the Lakers.

The road may have gotten even bumpier for them after LeBron James hurt his ankle. He very well could be limited going forward — or even possibly miss some time.

Obviously, Los Angeles can’t afford that. Not with the Lakers dangerously close to falling out of the play-in. The New Orleans Pelicans are in the No. 9 spot and Los Angeles is in 10th.

There was a preview of that

possible matchup Sunday as the Pelicans rallied from 23 points down late in the second quarter to knock off the Lakers 116-108. James didn’t hide his feelings over blowing a big lead in a game in which he twisted his left ankle.

“Excuse my language but that’s what it feels like,” James said after using profanity to describe his emotions. “It feels like another wasted opportunity, obviously, for myself and for our team.”

There’s no margin for error for Los Angeles with the San Antonio Spurs — winners of four straight — only a half-game out of the last spot.

At the moment, the Los Angeles Clippers occupy the eighth position. Imagine if they were to get back some combination of Paul George, Kawhi Leonard and Norman Powell.

All of a sudden, they’re an even scarier eighth seed.

The current standings would

pit the Clippers against the Timberwolves in a play-in scenario. But Minnesota could still catch the Nuggets for No. 6.

Karl-Anthony Towns and the Timberwolves remain two games behind the Nuggets and they play Friday in Denver. Whoever grabs the sixth seed will more than likely draw Steph Curry and the Golden State Warriors, who are third in the standings. Memphis comfortably sits in the second spot.

“It’s really, really hard going into the playoffs to predict a clear winner,” said Oklahoma City coach Mark Daigneault, whose team is eliminated from the postseason but closes the season by playing the Jazz, Lakers and Clippers. “It’s been a bear of a conference for a long time.”

That’s why being at home could mean everything. Which is precisely why the Dallas Mavericks’ 114-100 win over Utah on Sunday may prove so pivotal.

## Giannis scores 40 points, leads Bucks past 76ers

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 40 points and had a game-deciding block of Joel Embiid in the final seconds to lead the Milwaukee Bucks to a 118-116 victory over the Philadelphia 76ers on Tuesday night in a matchup of two of the Eastern Conference’s top teams.

Khris Middleton added 22 points and Jrue Holiday had 18 for the Bucks, who pulled within a half-game of idle Miami for first place in the East.

James Harden had 32 points and nine rebounds for the 76ers, and Embiid recovered from a slow start and finished with 29 points, 14 rebounds and seven assists. Philadelphia dropped 1½ games behind the Heat.

Antetokounmpo added 14 rebounds, six assists and three blocks for defending NBA

champion Milwaukee. The last block was the most important as he swatted away Embiid’s layup attempt with 1.6 seconds left. The officials originally ruled that it was goaltending, tying the score, but the call was overturned after a video review.

**Clippers 121, Jazz 115:** Paul George scored 34 points in his return after missing three months and host Los Angeles rallied from 25 points down to beat Utah.

Reggie Jackson added 21 points for the Clippers, who snapped a five-game skid with a 39-point fourth quarter after trailing by 16 early in the period.

From there, Los Angeles outscored the Jazz 34-12 to end the game. The Clippers took their first lead of the game, 110-109, on a jumper by Isaiah Hartenstein.

**Mavericks 128, Lakers 110:**

Luka Doncic had 34 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists, and host Dallas routed Los Angeles, which was missing LeBron James because of an ankle issue.

The Lakers (31-44) are tied with San Antonio for the final play-in spot in the Western Conference with seven games remaining for both teams.

Malik Monk scored 28 points and Russell Westbrook had 25 for Los Angeles, which dropped its third straight for their fifth losing streak at least that long in the past two months.

**Nets 130, Pistons 123:** Kevin Durant scored 41 points and host Brooklyn rallied past Detroit.

Kyrie Irving added 24 points in his second home appearance since New York exempted athletes from a private employer mandate for COVID-19 vaccinations last week. Andre Drum-

mond had 14 points and 13 rebounds as the Nets overcame a double-digit deficit in the second quarter.

Cade Cunningham led the Pistons with 34 points. Isaiah Stewart and Saddiq Bey each had 15.

**Bulls 107, Wizards 94:** DeMar DeRozan scored 14 of his 32 points in the fourth quarter and visiting Chicago beat Washington.

Nikola Vucevic scored 27 points for the Bulls, who are trying to stay in the top six in the Eastern Conference and avoid the play-in round of the postseason. Chicago (44-32) took a half-game lead over Toronto (43-32) for fifth place in the East.

Rui Hachimura scored 21 points for the Wizards, who had their modest two-game winning streak snapped. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope added 20.



# Jayhawks enter Final Four recalling lost opportunity

*Associated Press*

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Christian Braun's eyes opened wide when he learned that after Kansas had beaten Miami to return to the Final Four such a raging party had broken out back in Lawrence that authorities had to shut down Massachusetts Street, the popular bar and restaurant district near campus.

It was a much more welcome shutdown than the one Braun experienced two years earlier.

Braun and his teammates were sitting in their hotel room in downtown Kansas City in 2020, waiting to play in the quarterfinal round of the Big 12 Tournament, and news began filtering out that it had been canceled because of a virus few knew anything about. In short order, the NCAA Tournament also was shut down, and what may have been one of the best teams Jayhawks coach Bill Self had ever assembled would never have a chance to prove it.

"We all knew we were a pretty good team that year. We were No. 1 for a long time," said Braun, who was a role player as a freshman in 2020, but is now one of the star players for a team that is headed back to the national semifinals.

"For it to get canceled like that," Braun said, "that kind of sucked for a while."

The what-might-have-beens may never go away entirely.

After all, Kansas spent four weeks at No. 1 and were there for the final Top 25 poll, the closest anybody would get to being crowned national champion. They lost just three games all season: to No. 4 Duke in the Champions Classic in New York, to No. 18 Villanova in Philadelphia and to Baylor, which by then had risen to No. 4, at Allen Fieldhouse.

Coincidentally, the Blue Devils and the Wildcats will be joining the Jayhawks in New Orleans this weekend.

That loss to the Bears came on Jan. 11, 2020, and despite a few close shaves, Kansas never lost again that season. They rolled through the rest of their Big 12 schedule, going 17-1 to win the championship in a landslide, and they almost certainly would have been the overwhelming choice to be the No. 1 overall seed for the big dance.

"We had arguably as good a team as anybody," Self acknowledged Tuesday.

They had peerless point guard play from Devon Dotson and a game-changing post player in Udoka Azuibe, both of whom

would be voted second-team All-Americans and are now playing professionally. They had role players such as Braun and Ochai Agbaji, and a defensive stopper in Marcus Garrett, along with depth across the board.

"We had a lot of great pieces," Kansas big man David McCormack recalled, "and felt like we could go really far."

Instead, the group largely disbanded after the season, the inexorable turnover of college basketball yielding a far different team last year. Despite many of the same faces, it was one that struggled to the bitter end, when it was pounded by Southern California in the second round of an NCAA Tournament played entirely inside an Indianapolis bubble.

"Losing that game last year in the tournament didn't feel good for us, either," Braun said.

So combine the missed opportunity of playing for a title in 2020 with a disheartening dud in 2021 and, well, it's not much of a surprise that the top-seeded Jayhawks have been on a mission this March.

They blew out Texas Southern in the opening round, then skated past Creighton and Providence with only a few hairy moments along the way, then routed the Hurricanes last weekend to punch their ticket to the Big Easy.

Agbaji and McCormack were sophomores two years ago and are the grizzled seniors this year. Braun is a junior who has been playing crucial minutes since he stepped on campus. Jalen Wilson, who played in just two games during the 2019-20 season because of an injury, has become one of their most important players during this year's run.

Next up for them is Villanova, a familiar NCAA Tournament foe, on Saturday night at the Superdome. The Jayhawks lost to the Wildcats in the Final Four in 2018, long before the pandemic turned everything upside down.

"It was definitely a heartbreak feeling knowing that we definitely clawed our way to the top that year," McCormack said of that COVID-canceled postseason. "Now this year feels like we're avenging that year. Now that we have the opportunity, we're going to make the most of it and just continue to grow as a team with each game. And just do what we weren't able to do or didn't have an opportunity to do within that 2020 year."

# Woods arrives at Augusta as talk mounts of the Masters

*Associated Press*

Tiger Woods flew to Augusta National on Tuesday, sparking even greater speculation the Masters next week could be his first time competing against the best since a car crash 14 months ago severely injured his right leg.

Various plane-tracking websites showed a Gulfstream registered to Woods leaving South Florida at about 9 a.m., and the twitter handle "Eureka Earth" showed the private jet on the runway at Augusta's regional airport.

SI.com's "Morning Read" cited a source as saying Woods was at Augusta National with 12-year-old son Charlie. Woods' agent at Excel Sports did not immediately respond to a voicemail from The Associated Press seeking comment.

Woods has not said anything publicly or even walked in a way that suggested he would be ready to play his first major — and first PGA Tour event — since the Masters in November 2020.

Speculation began to pick up when Phil Mickelson was removed from the list of players who plan to compete in the Masters, which starts April 7. Woods was still on the active invited players list, and when asked a week ago for guidance on a decision, his agent said it was too early.

Unlike regular tournaments, players don't have a commitment deadline. Woods is a five-time Masters champion who can play every year. It's up to him to tell Augusta National whether he will play, and that can happen all the way up until the start of the tournament.

Woods was seen playing at The Medalist near his home in Jupiter Island, Fla., over the weekend. He presumably was at Augusta National to see how his legs could hold up on one of the toughest walks in golf. The course has elevations on nearly every hole.

He played in December in the PNC Championship with his son — they finished runner-up — in a 36-hole tournament in Florida where Woods was able to ride in a cart and the format was a scramble.

"But to be able to be out here and play, call it six rounds of golf, a practice round, pro-am, four competitive days, it's the cumulative effect of all that. I'm not able to do that yet. I'm still working on getting to that point," Woods said six weeks ago at Riviera.

# Matthews' league-leading 49th goal lifts Leafs

Associated Press

BOSTON — Auston Matthews scored his league-leading 49th goal and had an assist as the Toronto Maple Leafs ended the Boston Bruins' four-game winning streak with a 6-4 victory on Tuesday night.

Matthews' goal late in the second period was the fourth of five straight scored by the Maple Leafs, who held a 6-1 lead and flustered the Bruins into a string of retaliatory hits and penalties.

Colin Blackwell scored his first goal since joining Toronto in a trade at the deadline. Morgan Rielly, Alexander Kerfoot and Mitchell Marner each had a goal and an assist. John Tavares added two assists and Erik Kallgren had 23 saves.

David Pastrnak scored his 38th goal for Boston. Jake DeBrusk, Curtis Lazar, Taylor Hall also scored for the Bruins, who could not keep up with the speedy Maple Leafs.

Jeremy Swayman allowed six goals on 25 shots before being replaced by Linus Ullmark at the start of the third period.

**Avalanche 2, Flames 1:** Valeri Nichushkin scored twice and Darcy Kuemper stopped 44 shots as Colorado won at Calgary in a matchup of Western Conference division leaders.

The Central Division-leading Avalanche won the season series 2-1 and did so without Nathan MacKinnon (lower body), their leading scorer who was hurt in a third-period fight with Minnesota's Matt Dumba on Sunday.

Nazem Kadri took MacKinnon's spot on Colorado's top line with Nichushkin and Mikko Rantanen. After going winless in his two previous starts, Kuemper improved to 31-

9-3 overall.

Tyler Toffoli scored for the Pacific Division-leading Flames. Jacob Markstrom topped 28 shots.

**Rangers 3, Penguins 2:** Frank Vatrano and Braden Schneider scored less than five minutes apart in the second period, Chris Kreider added his 45th goal in the third and New York moved into second place in the Metropolitan Division with a win at Pittsburgh.

Igor Shesterskin made 22 saves, including a stop on Penguins forward Jake Guentzel in the final seconds to help the Rangers beat Pittsburgh for the second time in five days.

The Penguins, coming off an 11-goal outburst in a romp over Detroit on Sunday, needed nearly two full periods to muster that many shots against New York as the Rangers won for the second time in three meetings.

Sidney Crosby scored his 25th goal and Brian Boyle got his ninth for Pittsburgh. Tristan Jarry stopped 23 shots but fell to 6-2 in his last eight starts, with both losses coming to New York.

**Lightning 4, Hurricanes 3 (OT):** Steven Stamkos scored a power-play goal 52 seconds into overtime and had two regulation assists as host Tampa Bay beat Carolina.

Stamkos got the winner from the slot off Nikita Kucherov's third assist of the game.

**Panthers 7, Canadiens 4:** Jonathan Huberdeau and Ryan Lomberg both had two goals and an assist to lead host Florida past Montreal.

Sam Bennett and Aleksander Barkov each added a goal and an assist for the Atlantic Division leaders, who are tied with Car-

olina for the top playoff seed in the Eastern Conference. Both teams have 96 points, though the Panthers have a game in hand.

**Islanders 4, Blue Jackets 3:** Brock Nelson scored his career-high 32nd goal, Semyon Varlamov made 42 saves and New York won at Columbus.

Josh Bailey, Anthony Beauvillier and Zach Parise also scored as the Islanders snapped a two-game skid. They moved within two points of the Blue Jackets in the standings, but both teams are well behind Washington for the last Eastern Conference wild card spot.

**Wild 4, Flyers 1:** Marc-Andre Fleury made 32 saves and won his second straight start for Minnesota, which extended its winning streak to seven games with a victory over visiting Philadelphia.

Matt Dumba, Kirill Kaprizov, Jordan Greenway and Kevin Fiala scored for the Wild. The victory ended a streak of three consecutive overtime wins by the score of 3-2 for Minnesota.

**Stars 3, Ducks 2:** Roope Hintz and Jacob Peterson scored in the third period to help Dallas rally for a win at Anaheim.

Radek Faksa had a goal, Jake Oettinger made 26 saves and the Stars moved one point ahead of Vegas for the second wild card from the Western Conference with three games in hand.

**Predators 4, Senators 1:** Michael McCarron scored twice and Juuse Saros made 36 saves to lead host Nashville over Ottawa.

Tanner Jeannot and Matt Duchene also scored and Mattias Ekholm had three assists for the Predators, winners of two straight.

## 3-time Pro Bowl safety Jenkins retires after 13 years

Associated Press

Malcolm Jenkins is retiring after a 13-year NFL career in which he established himself as one of the league's best all-around safeties, most durable players and leading voices for social justice.

Jenkins helped both the New Orleans Saints and Philadelphia Eagles win their only Super Bowls and made a major impact off the field as an activist, entrepreneur and philanthropist.

"I've been playing football since I was 7 years old, and I've

accomplished so much in that time," Jenkins told The Associated Press. "When I set out to have my career, I wanted to change the game or at least have an impact on the game, not only on the field but off the field. ... Made the Pro Bowls and had all the accolades and really I felt I left a mark on the game that was my own unique way, and I think, at this point, I'm really excited to pour all that energy and effort that I put into excelling in football into doing some of the other things in life, some of the pro-

jects that I have a passion for and it's just that time for me."

The 34-year-old Jenkins was selected by the Saints as a cornerback in the first round of the 2009 draft out of Ohio State. He switched to safety the following season and thrived. He left New Orleans for Philadelphia in 2014 and started every game during six seasons with the Eagles. He made three Pro Bowls and was an instrumental leader on the 2017 Eagles team that won the Super Bowl despite losing starting quarterback Carson Wentz

and several key starters.

Jenkins played 2,651 consecutive snaps from the start of the 2017 playoffs through part of the 2020 season in New Orleans. He returned to the Saints that year and helped them go 4-0 against Tom Brady and the Buccaneers in the regular season the past two years. But Tampa Bay beat New Orleans in the 2020 playoffs in Drew Brees' final game.

"I think competition is probably the biggest thing that I'll miss about the game," Jenkins said.